

them, so I'm forced to buy more. The grocer knows my routine. He displays the green ones temptingly in the window. From his standpoint, it makes terrific business sense.

#### PORTRAIT OF JUAN

Juan's been part of the maintenance crew  
for years  
he plays blackjack in the freight elevator  
walks around with hundreds of keys on his belt  
happily ignores his beeper  
nobody talks to him  
except when they want a new file cabinet  
or when they lock themselves out of their  
office, could he come up and open it  
the women to him  
they're either complete bitches or fabulous  
sex goddesses, and he makes sure  
everyone knows what he thinks  
he works out of this filthy utility closet  
with wires and fuses packed into the walls  
and he sleeps in there  
he's never there when you need him  
but he's always there when you don't need him  
so you come away feeling  
he's essentially there  
he really doesn't have a lot going for him  
except for one thing:  
his lunches  
he always has these incredible lunches  
meatball heroes with just the right amount of sauce  
slopping out the sides, you can smell it in the elevator  
riding up with him  
looking down at your own anemic bag  
of tuna salad, diet Sprite  
wishing you weren't so obsessed  
with your sodium intake  
that you could walk around  
with hundreds of keys on your belt  
and not feel locked out  
of so many things.

#### CRITIQUE

It's only September  
and the supermarkets are already jacking up the price  
of candy corn and cranberries. And pecans.



Pecans are up too.  
I have an uncle who's allergic to pecans.  
He has to be rushed to the hospital if he eats any.  
Outside, the leaves are starting to fall  
and it seems as if everybody's in school  
except me. Why did I ever leave school?  
Why didn't I get my M.F.A. from John Ashbery  
the way I told everyone I would?  
Even John said "You can't do very much with it  
but you should finish what you start."  
I remember a hot September day in his office  
when his window was stuck  
and he asked me to help him open it  
and I did (both of us straining) and almost immediately  
a yellow-jacket flew in and landed  
on the sweaty plastic lid he'd set down next to  
his coffee cup  
He swatted it away and read my poems  
in about three seconds, saying I shouldn't  
deliberately make light of a situation I'd  
established as serious, that I should try  
to draw attention to what I was saying  
and not to myself, saying it.

I was crushed, but I knew he was right.  
I pulled out another poem  
and he said, "This is better. You're  
not trying so hard to be a stand-up comedian  
in this one ..."  
But our time was up.  
He closed his briefcase and threw his cup, his napkin,  
and his tiny non-dairy creamer container into the  
wastebasket.  
I told him I'd see him in class  
next Tuesday  
and he said isn't there  
a Jewish holiday next Tuesday  
and I said oh right  
and I left  
and I heard him shut the window by himself.

#### DRAGSTERS DOWN IN JERSEY

No, I don't want to watch the dragsters  
down in Jersey, I don't like those boys and girls.  
They wouldn't be doing that if they were nice.  
How disgusting of them to eat three corn-dogs  
at a time, and throw the sticks in the street.  
I'm being critical because I'm uncomfortable here.